

Edward Roberts

EULOGY FOR EDWARD R. ROBERTS

By John Martland, a partner with Bennett Jones LLP, Calgary, Alberta
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Good Afternoon.

Leslie has asked me, and I am so greatly honoured, to deliver the Eulogy as part of this comforting memorial service. Although with heavy hearts, we are here to give thanks for having known such a special man. Whether you called him Dad, Granddad, Ed, Mr. Roberts, Fast Eddie or Freddy Quickfinger, he left an indelible impression on all he met, as this packed church attests.

Ed's daughter Leslie, with her husband Mike and sons Cam and Robin and Ed's "black Lady" Coco are with us today. His sons Craig – in the U.S. – and Brent – in Australia – unfortunately cannot attend but will get together with Leslie in Oregon to hold a family memorial. Today we pay tribute to Ed, the community man and wonderful Calgarian.

Ed was born in Calgary – though he used to say that he didn't recall much about the event. He played cricket and baseball, attended Western Canada High School and was both a choirboy in the Anglican Church and a water boy for the Calgary Broncs. He worked for a while as a clerk at the Gas Company and then joined the RCAF when he was old enough, becoming a Flying Officer. He was such a proficient pilot that he became an instructor. In later years he was much involved at the Officer's Mess where he became close friends of another great pilot – Milt Harradence.

After the war, he joined Peat Marwick to study for and become a CA. About the same time he was courting a young lady named Kaye Luke, a passenger agent with TransCanada Airlines. Ed delighted in telling about the rule at TCA that the female employees couldn't work there if they were married! This led to a long engagement until he had enough earning power to support her, with marriage in 1951.

He worked for a few years with Riley's Reproductions from which Mac Jones of the Nolan Chambers law firm recruited him. Once with the firm he met various lawyers who were to become life long friends, including Herb Laycraft, Bert Wyman, Don Sabey, Gordon Brown, Jack Major, Joe Stratton and Walter O'Donoghue.

He was one of Western Canada's first Law Office Managers and in 1986 he received a special distinction when he was designated a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants, in recognition of his work as a pioneer in Law Office Management. Gordon Brown points out that Ed's functions as Chief Accountant, Office Manager, Financial Officer, Administrative Head and Manager of Human Resources are now nicely handled by a staff of 67.

Throughout his busy professional career Ed was also an extraordinary contributor to the life of Calgary, first through the Kinsmen Club of which he became President, then as a Director of the Calgary Stampede and Chairman of the Grandstand Committee. His mentor and close friend was Stew Barker. He always had a zest for the world of show business, perhaps developed when he participated in the infamous 1948 Grey Cup train

which went from the Cow town to the Hog town and marked the start of the true national festival that the Grey Cup became.

But his crowning achievement and greatest event came when he chaired the Ceremonies Committee for the 1988 Winter Olympics. He recruited outstanding professionals Paddy Sampson and Hugh Dunne and loved working with them, as much as they did with him. The very close personal friendship he maintained with both these fellows is proof of that.

Through all these activities, Ed's exquisite sense of humour and the manner and style in which he carried out his varied activities, marked him apart. In speaking to so many of his old pals this past week, the comments have centered on his humour, his decency, his people skills and his good will. With that ever present twinkle in his eye, you always felt he was on the verge of a quip or one of his well thought out queries: "Now Hugh, is it true that since you worked in Premier Klein's office, the credit for keeping Ralph on the straight and narrow should go to you?". His mouth would quiver in anticipation of your response, always ready for a chuckle or a roar of laughter.

It is small wonder that Artie Johnson of "Laugh-in" became a great pal of Ed's. He undoubtedly recognized a kindred comedic spirit, a person who could fashion a fine tale or a clever quip. For example:

At the 1988 Opening Ceremonies, an Olympic official was slated to swear in the Judges. Before a packed stadium and a television audience of millions, she stumbled: "Is it on?". "Is the mike live?" Ed told Gordon Coates later: "I just want you to know - I was her trainer!"

Of course Ed Roberts was a merry prankster. His most famous stunt was the one organized for a convention of Chartered Accountants in 1969. A special train took over 1,000 conventioners from Banff to Calgary in antique railway cars, including baggage cars used as Saloons. There were special passengers such as a "Minister" administering retread marriages, and a group of "Hutterites" clambering aboard and making their way through the crowd selling dead chickens and rotten vegetables.

At Morley Flats passengers were stunned to see several boxcars aflame on a siding. The train stopped, 100 Indian braves on horseback attacked and carried off a half dozen of the women. It became known as the "Great Train Ride" and the subject of a T.V. documentary. In the accounting world, it also became known as: "The day the accountants had fun".

For the legal profession also he was a real splash of colour on an otherwise drab landscape. He taught student Jack Major, a future Supreme Court Judge, how to play "Seven Toed Pete" – a poker game - , in the basement filing room.

When Herb Laycraft was appointed as a trial judge, he received the following letter: "We retain unforgettable memories of your various contributions, not the least being your agility with Miss Sawyers, particularly in the two-step at the Christmas party. So that you may exploit your athletic propensities, the firm encloses this equipment".

The gift was a tennis package which included two left shoes and a racket short a few strings.

In the Bentall Building one day, when an important closing was taking place in the Boardroom, the fire alarm went off for a practice drill. Startled icons of the business world were taken aback, when the Boardroom door opened suddenly and Roberts rushed through – in a Fireman's helmet, carrying a watering can.

In 1986 Bill Britton invited Ed Roberts along on a trip with the Denver Broncos to London, England for an NFL exhibition game. With the complicity of the Denver's Head Coach Dan Reeves, they cooked up a scheme that Ed would be introduced as a star quarter back of yesteryear from the CFL. Roberts played the role perfectly on the flight to London and had the players well and truly sucked in. The prank however took a momentary nasty turn when Bill phoned him early on the morning of the game to say Ed should get down to the stadium immediately to suit up, as the boys wanted to put him in for a play or two since he was such a pro.

For years in the office Ed single-handedly wrote and published a publication he called "The Trombone". In a style reminiscent of the Calgary Eye Opener, he would seize upon trivial events (typically fabricated) to amuse and delight his dull readership. It covered sports events like this one:

"Bennett Jones personnel will be disappointed to learn the firm entry in the Fifth Annual Sheep River Road Race did not fare well. Dale Shurvell and Walter O'Donoghue started well and were running easily but disaster struck at the three-kilometer mark when the latch string of O'Donoghue's ill-fitting bloomers broke, dropping them suddenly to his ankles and causing a nasty spill, which ended his run. Shurvell lost his way in a fog patch, and ended up in the Priddis cemetery".

After a letter to the Calgary Herald wondering if the President of the Calgary Stampeder Football Club knew the difference between a volleyball and a football, the following interview appeared in the Trombone:

Tremblechin: You have seen the allegation Mr. Britton and I want this interview to be, in the tradition of the Trombone, brutally frank, so I ask you straight out – no beating around the bush – no waffling – do they – or if I may – do you know the difference between a volleyball and a football?

Britton: "That's a good question. It's a fair question. It's a question that should be asked. The people are entitled to know and I am sure that I speak for the President, my fellow directors, the players, the trainer and the equipment manager when I say I appreciate the opportunity of responding.

Tremblechin: "What's the answer?"

Britton: "What's the question?"

Tremblechin: "Do you know the difference between a volleyball and a football?"

Britton: "Do you?"

Tremblechin: "I'm not a director"

Britton: "You said it"

Tremblechin: "You don't know the difference?"

Britton: "I do"

Tremblechin: "You don't"

Britton: "I do"

Tremblechin: "What is it?"

Britton: "It's plastics".

He covered social events under the by-line Gladys Hoothpistle:

"Douglas Alan Ast, a prominent Calgary solicitor, is pictured below re-arranging the entrance to his guest house following culmination of social activities which occurred during a family reunion early in September. Said Mr. Ast: "My wife Barb (nee Lawson) and I decided to shake our Family trees and have a grand reunion. Over 80 attended and both sides of our family were about evenly distributed. What I mean is, about half were Lawsons and the others, of course, were half-Ast".

Roberts mastered a speaking style in the manner of Bob Hope. Indeed he even looked a bit like Bob Hope and could get a laugh just by turning the side of his mouth down and raising his eyebrows. His humour was clever, never nasty. In reviewing the military career of his friend Gordon Peterson he addressed the Rotary Club:

"There is nothing to say about Gordon Peterson. I have been given four minutes but his contribution could be summed up in four seconds – or two words: best forgotten".

He was a role model for us all as he went through the various setbacks that life brings. He lost his beloved Kaye in 1998 but remained philosophical, and unfailingly positive. He would joke about the things that happened to him, even his significant bout with prostate cancer. Now he has boarded his last train.

"Times up Martland" I hear a distinctive voice saying. Well thank you Ed Roberts for an exemplary life, for the strength and warmth of your friendship and for making us laugh.